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### ***Marion County Prosecutor's Office to file criminal charges against parents who neglect to send children to school***

*Initiative is part of Prosecutor Curry's comprehensive approach to foster healthy families and children*

(Indianapolis, Ind.) The Marion County Prosecutor's Office (MCPO) announced today that it will begin to file charges in criminal court against parents who neglect to send their children to school.

Prosecutor Curry's initiative to curb chronic absenteeism and truancy will take effect at the start of the 2011-2012 school year and will focus on parents of children 11 years of age or younger. It is the first in a series of initiatives Prosecutor Curry is leading to foster an environment that encourages healthier families and children in Marion County, ultimately leading to a safer and stronger community.

"One of the best crime prevention tactics is an education," Prosecutor Curry said, "and research plainly demonstrates that failure to send a child to school does lasting damage to that child. That is why we are putting teeth behind the law and holding parents accountable."

Since the early 1990s, Failure to Ensure School Attendance cases have been filed by the MCPO in juvenile court. Filing cases in adult court gives the office additional leverage when interacting with parents who neglect to send their children to school. Last year, prosecutors filed 155 Failure to Ensure School Attendance cases, which is a B Misdemeanor.

The MCPO will work with school social workers throughout Marion County as part of this comprehensive effort to curb chronic truancy. By law, a child is defined as "habitually truant" after missing ten school days. Similar to previous years, parents will be notified by the school social workers after two or three absences. Once proper notification has occurred, these cases should be forwarded to the MCPO by the school social worker. If the MCPO finds during its screening process that charges are warranted, a summons will be issued to the parent to appear in criminal court.

Parents involved in failure to ensure attendance will be entered in most cases in a diversion program, which will be tailored to meet the needs of the parents. The diversion agreement will allow only for excused absences. If the parents do not comply with the diversion program, they may face jail time. The diversion program

for Failure to Ensure School Attendance cases will not take into account any previous criminal history of the parents.

"The purpose of this initiative is not to target parents who are facing difficult personal circumstances," Prosecutor Curry said. "The purpose is get kids in school and connect parents to the resources they need."

Chronic absenteeism and truancy has a significant negative impact on communities. In addition to putting a child at a higher risk of involvement in criminal activity and contributing to criminal mischief during the daytime hours, a recent report by the National Conference of State Legislatures' Task Force on School Dropout and Prevention and Recovery found that every year, one in 10 kindergarten and first grade students miss a month of school with excused and unexcused absences. The report also notes that since failure to read proficiently by the end of third grade is linked to higher dropout rates, the early grades are a critical time to intervene.